

Prepare for a successful response: Develop a security and emergency preparedness plan

by Ira Allen

It seems an awful lot of newsletter articles focus on various forms of emergency preparedness. If you've noticed this pattern, you may also have guessed it's not coincidental. Emergency situations happen to everybody. The troubling truth is, if they haven't happened at your agency yet, they probably will. What will you do? What will the driver involved do? How about your dispatcher? Do you know? If you do, that's great. But if you're a little unclear, it's time to create a Security and Emergency Preparedness Plan (SEPP).

Sandy Throne, President of California-based Emergency Planning Services, says "It's time for people to really wake up...every company should have a [Security and Emergency Preparedness Plan]." This article will give you some basic tools to use in preparing that plan.

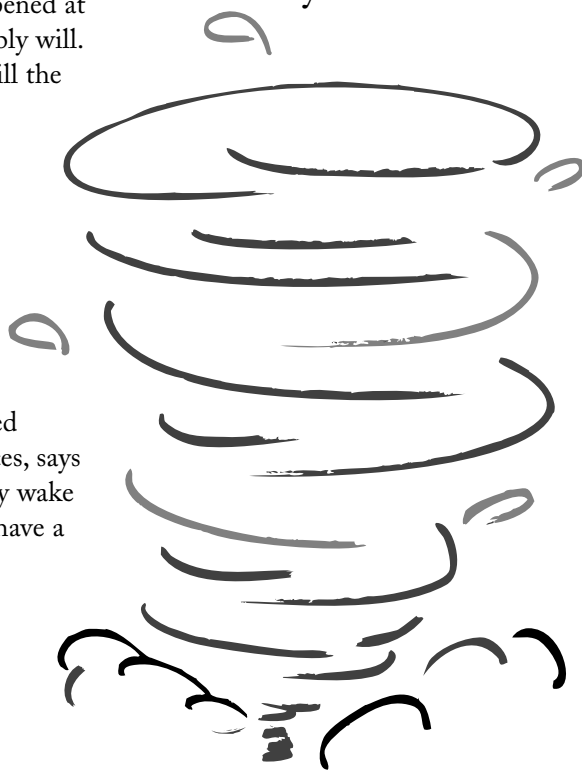
First things first

Decide your priorities; understanding these will be invaluable in guiding your decisions throughout this process. For most agencies, the first priority will be protecting human life and safety. Preserving vehicles and equipment might edge out maintaining good public relations for second priority. While these are common priorities, there is nothing saying

they must be your agency's. Perhaps the safety and well-being of your drivers and passengers is most important, with a minimization of bad publicity coming in second. Whatever the case, you will need to

likely to be involved in an emergency: drivers. Do not overlook drivers as potential treasure troves of information and ideas about how best to deal with emergency situations (and various other aspects of

In the event of an emergency, whether an accident, terrorism or tornado, what will you do? What will your drivers do? Your dispatcher?



determine what is most important to your agency. Your mission statement should help with that. From there, you can move on to the actual process of preparing an emergency response plan.

Get input from all quarters

The ideal emergency response plan will include input from those most

transit, for that matter). Many drivers in Kansas have been working in the industry for years, even decades. It would be a shame to let all their experience, knowledge and ideas go to waste simply because of a communication lag between management and drivers.

By the same token, soliciting input from the rest of your staff also can be valuable. Dispatchers and office staff bring different perspectives and can have fresh ideas for dealing with emergency situations from their individual viewpoints. If your agency has several departments, as some transit providers in Kansas do, every department should be represented. Also involve the employees' union, if applicable. Although unions are not common in Kansas, some agencies' employees, such as those of the "T" in Lawrence, have voted to unionize.

Make sure all employees are aware of what you are trying to accomplish; this way, you will get as many ideas as possible. Once again, a clear mission statement can be very helpful. The idea here is, the broader your information base, the more

detailed and comprehensive your emergency/disaster plan can be. Throne's firm has compiled a workbook that can help agencies uncover the information they will need in planning. For more information, contact Sandy Throne at (408) 342-9035 or at sthrone@epserve.com.

Who's the boss?

While it can be helpful to have an emergency preparedness team or committee composed of various individuals from within your agency, someone must lead this team. The *Public Transportation System Security and Emergency Preparedness Planning Guide*, from McCormick, Taylor & Associates, has this to say:

"At a particular transportation system, security and emergency preparedness management responsibility generally should be assigned to one person. That person may or may not be designated full-time to this program, but some person should be in charge of this effort, even if he or she has other responsibilities."

This is to prevent the planning and emergency response process from becoming haphazard and to preserve accountability. Someone must be directly responsible for the planning process, as well as implementing and enforcing the plan. The *Guide* has a couple of recommendations about this position: The "security manager" should a) report directly to the agency's executive director or Board, and b) receive a separate budget line-item for security/safety activities.

In terms of the plan itself, there are two basic approaches, according to Helen Cope, Emergency Planning Officer for the London Borough of Hackney: "One side argues that a short, concise document to act as a 'grab guide' highlighting the procedures of departments and agencies is more than adequate, while the other

side believes that the Emergency Plan should be all-encompassing, which often results in a lengthy, often unread document."

Cope's approach in creating the London Borough of Hackney's Emergency Plan was to develop a comprehensive document, with a "grab guide" given as an appendix. The benefit to her approach is that it offers all the traditional information for review at any time, but also gives leaders the ability to glance through an abbreviated guide in times of emergency to ensure nothing is forgotten. This could be particularly useful in an emergency that affects the transit facility itself, such as a fire or tornado.

Cooperating with others

Your SEPP will obviously need to focus on issues specific to your locale, but some issues affect all transit providers. One of these, which has received a considerable amount of media attention since September 11, is integration with local police and emergency agencies and personnel in providing emergency/disaster relief support. To achieve this goal, it may be necessary to initiate formal meetings and committees with local public safety officers and community emergency planners.

Sometimes emergency response centers say they will help you, but they are not always as forthcoming with the actual help when it comes down to it, according to Throne. You may need to make a special effort to integrate your SEPP with the emergency response plans of other agencies. Remember, in the event of a disaster affecting a large area, transit can be invaluable in providing support and transportation for victims, so your SEPP might cover more than simply the safety of your own facilities and personnel.

Help with plan design

Creating an emergency response plan can be time-consuming and labor-intensive, and although most of us recognize the necessity, some may be pressed for the time to actually sit down and compile the plan (or update the relic you've been working with, unchanged since 1978). If this description fits you, consider using a consulting firm to help prepare your plan. Sandy Throne answered a few questions about how her company (an emergency issues consulting firm) addresses this process.

She noted that her job is to be a fresh (and expert) set of eyes. "It's a safety awareness thing," she said, "I do a safety check and call attention to various possible scenarios."

Because agencies can't always see how everyday activities might be detrimental if circumstances altered dramatically (as they do in the case of an emergency), it can be helpful to have a safety expert there to call attention to various possible scenarios and assist in thinking through the issues.

Let's face it: When someone in transit says "emergency," most of us probably think, "accident." A SEPP, however, should also cover response to and recovery from tornadoes, floods, terrorist incidents and any other emergencies that could possibly arise. A new pair of eyes can help you see possibilities that may otherwise have gone unnoticed.

You may be thinking, "Yeah, but who can afford all that?" Perhaps your agency can, if you budget for it. "An average cost is \$1500-\$2000," says Throne. That seems like a reasonable operating expense for safety, particularly as a plan needs to be developed only once. After the plan is in place, Throne recommends updating your plan quarterly, either

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through the services of a company such as hers (\$500/year) or on your own. She notes, "If you [update] it four times a year, it might take you 10 or 15 minutes...if you wait 12 or 15 months it becomes a bigger project—especially if the previous preparer has left the company; then it's a major project."

Do it yourself

Should you decide to prepare your plan entirely in-house, there are a couple things you should remember. First, it requires making a commitment and sticking to it, which can be hard, because you will need to set aside blocks of hours to deal with this. It may be tempting to let that slide, especially if your agency already has some sort of plan. Don't let it slide. Make a commitment to do this, and keep it.

Second, many transit managers haven't had a great deal of training on how to prepare plans. "It's a learning curve about what you need to do, how to do it and how to put it on paper," says Throne. So don't get too frustrated with yourself if things don't

proceed smoothly right away.

One way to get some free help is by talking with someone who has already prepared a SEPP. Another relatively inexpensive method is to purchase a fill-in-the-blanks manual from a company like Throne's. These can cost around \$500, and should help you create "a totally workable plan that is customizable for your agency," according to Throne.

Other options for help in preparing a SEPP include a one-day workshop, like the one offered by Kansas RTAP in November 2002 in Salina, or the CTAA's safety audit service. There is also a CD-ROM produced by the Colorado DOT called *Transit Safety & Security* (see page 15 to borrow this). And transit agencies are developing more manuals every year. I probably don't need to tell you most people in transit are friendly enough to share some experience, strength and hope when asked.

Whatever route you go, know that this process is vital to the future of your agency. "There are a lot of statistics out there," Throne notes, "showing that unprepared companies tend to go out of business in the wake of a serious emergency." A SEPP is a commitment, not only to

your agency's future, but also to your employees and to your community. Transit agencies have the opportunity and the responsibility to be assets to their communities, and an emergency preparedness and response plan is one key facet of that responsibility.

Finally, once you have developed a plan, don't let it go to waste. Train. And train. And when you're done with that, train some more. But that's another article. For now, best of luck with your planning!

Sources

"National Transit Institute Course Overviews: *System Security Awareness for Transit Employees* and *Security Incident Management for Transit Supervisors*," 2002;

"Transit's Role in Emergency Response," *Technical Assistance Brief* (draft), National Transit Resource Center, 2003;

Transit Bus Safety Program: Task 3—Development of a Model Transit Bus Safety Program, Federal Transit Admin., July 16, 2001 draft; *Public Transportation System Security and Emergency Preparedness Planning Guide*, by John N. Balog et al, McCormick, Taylor & Associates, Inc., August 8, 2002. ▲